



THE BALANCE STRUCK: A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

BY THOMAS GUTHRIE, D.D.

"I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do."—Eccles. ii. 11.

OUR Lord pronounced the children of this world wise in their generation; and who can doubt that thousands who are lost would be saved, did they bring the same prudence, and diligence, and energy to their eternal, as they do to their temporal interests? In how many people do we see consummate wisdom joined to the greatest folly! They are wise enough to gain the world, and fools enough to lose their souls.

Convince a man that the only way to save his life is to lose his limb, and he does not hesitate an instant between living with one limb and being buried with two. Borne in, pale, yet resolute, he bares the diseased member to the knife—and how does that bleeding, fainting, groaning sufferer teach us to part with our sins rather than with our Saviour. If a life is better than a limb, how much better is heaven than a sin!

Two years ago a man was called to decide between his life and the gains of his lifetime. He stood on the deck of a ship that, coming from Australian gold fields, had—as some all but reach heaven—all but reached home and her harbour in safety. The exiles had coasted along their native shores; to-morrow, husbands would embrace their wives, children their parents, and not a few would realize their dream of returning to pass the calm evening of their days, envied, and happy amid the loved scenes of their youth. It was never more true, that there is much between the cup and the lip. Night came lowering down; and with the night the storm which wrecked ship, and hopes, and fortunes all together. The dawning light but showed them death staring them in the face. The sea ran mountains high—no boat could live in her. One chance remained. Pale women, weeping children, feeble and timid men, must die; but a stout, brave swimmer, with trust in God, and disencumbered of all impediments, might reach the

shore—where hundreds stood ready to dash into the surf, and, seizing, save him. One man was observed to go below. He bound around him a heavy belt, filled with gold, the hard gains of his life, and returned to the deck. One after another, he saw his fellows leap overboard; a brief struggle, and head after head went down—sunk by the gold they had fought hard to gain, and were loath to lose. Slowly he was seen to unbuckle his belt. His hopes had been bound up in it. It was to buy him land; it was the reward of long years of labour and weary exile. What he had endured for it! The sweat of his brow, the hopes of day and the dreams of night, were there. If he parts with it, he is a beggar; but if he keeps it he dies. He poised it in his grasp. Balancing it for a while, his fate trembling in the balance, with one strong desperate effort he flings it into the sea. It sinks with a sullen plunge; and now he follows it—not to sink, but, disencumbered of its weight, to swim, to beat the billows manfully, and, riding on the foaming surge, to reach the shore. Well done! Ay, well done, well chosen; but if a man, as the devil said, who for once spoke God's truth, will give all that he hath for his life, how much more should he give all he hath for his soul. Better to part with gold than with God; to bear a heavy cross than miss a heavenly crown.

Such lessons the children of this world teach the children of the kingdom, and among these, not the least important lesson, the duty of careful self-examination. Was there ever a successful merchant who did not balance his books year by year? I have often noticed, in reading the details of Courts of Bankruptcy, that fortunes are as surely wrecked by carelessness as by wild speculations, or by boundless extravagance. Here is an honest trader bankrupt. Sober, industrious,

"'Tis time to awake!" showers of golden rain
Now in rich blessing descend;
While the Spirit of love still pleads yet again,—
Your Comforter and your Friend.

"'Tis time to awake!" friends! be earnest, arise,
With courage your race to run:
Toil on, as true servants, to win the high prize,
To gain the glad word, "Well done."

"'Tis time to awake!" rest on Jesus alone;
His arm, when trial is o'er,
Shall bear you where light, as on earth never shone,
Gilds the bright eternal shore. E. M.

HONEY FROM THE ROCK.

THE traveller through the bleakest and wildest regions of ancient Palestine was sometimes surprised by coming upon a thrifty olive-tree growing on the scanty handful of earth that covers the flinty rocks. Or in the clefts of the rock he would find a busy colony of bees. The hidden comb would be dripping with the luscious outflow of wild honey. To his parched lips how delicious the pressings of the liquid sweetness! And all the more welcome because found in an *unexpected place*.

For it is not from rocks that the famished expect supplies. Bare, bald, bleak, barren is the rock. The eagle may perch on its out-jutting crag, the wild coney may nestle in its clefts, but the golden ears never wave over it, the vine never mantles its rough cheek with purple clusters. Yet out of these very rocks came the dripping honey-comb; and from the crevices crept up the solitary olive. So the wayworn and thirsty traveller did actually and literally "suck honey out of the rock, and oil from the flinty rock" (Deut. xxxii. 13).

The charm of this fact in natural history lies in this—that *blessings are found in unexpected quarters*. This is as true in spiritual history as it is in natural. And no season is so honey-yielding and oil-producing to the Christian as the flinty season of *adversity*. In the first place his religion is more highly prized; in the next place the world is held in less esteem. The affections do not centre then upon gold, or honours, on schemes of secular profit, not even on books or domestic joys. But in **JESUS** the bereaved soul looks for its purest satisfactions. The honey-comb is there. All sweet graces—the peace that passeth understanding—the godly contentment—the hungering for heaven—the fellowship of the Comforter,—all flow forth from the secret cells that lie hid within that rock of affliction. The believer, with the Bible in his hand and the Saviour in his heart, sits down and draws "honey from the rock."

How wonderfully God discovers to his people their richest joys in the flinty places of bereavement and sorrow! Do I lose my investments in bank stocks or rail-

way shares? Then I go up to my heavenly Father and inquire after my soul's investments in celestial treasures, and find they are all safe. Do I see my fair-weather friends deserting me in some pinching season of adversity? Then I flee the closer to Him who "sticketh closer than a brother." Do I bury up in the grave the darling of my cradle—or the sweet-voiced wife that made for me a sunshine in the shade—or the dear old mother that has beamed on us from her arm-chair for a lifetime? Then upward to my heavenly home and waiting kindred do I look, thankful that there is one home at last into which the spoiler never can penetrate. My thoughts go out towards God the oftener. Heaven seems nearer. Christ is certainly dearer. The closet is more eagerly sought; and life is more disentangled from the harassing cares, vexations, and absorptions of worldliness. How loath we were to be driven away into these dreary, outlying regions of adversity! And yet what delicious flowings of heavenly honey have our souls drawn from the flinty rock!

My brother! you make no greater mistake than when you suppose that the only things for which you ought to be congratulated are prosperous days, and fertile hours in the rich alluvials of life—are cloudless skies, and vernal airs. Those are not your safest hours, nor your most profitable. Do you ever thank God for a hurricane? Yet many a hurricane of trial has driven a sinner to Calvary, and sent a backsliding professor to his forsaken post of duty. Do you thank God for the deluge of sorrow? Yet how many a stubborn, barren heart has been mellowed by the descending floods! Much of the choicest, deepest, holiest portion of your character was engendered in those seasons of your history which called forth the pity and the condolence of thoughtless worldlings about you. You should have been congratulated, instead of being commiserated. You were, indeed, in the rough, jagged places of hardship and calamity. But never, never had your soul such honey offered it, as when the flinty rock was beneath you and the open heavens above you. It was your own fault—as well as your sad misfortune—if you did not feed copiously on the luscious drippings of Christ's honey-comb. When you grew weary by reason of the hardness of your pathway, then did the Everlasting Rest beckon you on the more invitingly. When evil news were dreaded, or were actually received, they but made the glad tidings of the gospel the more precious. When Death opened a grave at your side, he only opened a burial-place in which you might hide away for ever worldliness and sinful idolatries. When evil men vexed you and slandered you, what an onward stretch did your desires make towards that world where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest! And from the gateway of glory no portion of your earthly pilgrimage will appear to have yielded such agreeable disappointments as those hours of trial when you drew honey out of the rock, and oil from the flinty rock.—*T. L. Cuyler.*